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ABSTRACT

This monograph describes ways in which the small-group context can facilitate secondary-level students' composing skills through a structured writing cycle and can provide each student with individualized help during the writing process. An in-depth discussion is provided of the writing cycle, a process whereby the group provides continuous feedback during composition and evaluation phases. In addition, classroom applications for the writing cycle, and prepared and sample assignments are described; commentary on the implementation of writing stages, grading, and evaluation criteria is also included. (KS)

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INDIVIDUALIZING

THE TEACHING OF WRITING

—

USING SMALL GROUPS

IN THE COMPOSING PROCESS

LOS ANGELES CITY SCHOOLS
INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING DIVISION

PUBLICATION No. SC-728

1975

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GOAL: TO HELP STUDENTS WRITE BETTER

OBJECTIVES:

1. To develop composing skills through a structured writing cycle
2. To use small-group work as central in the writing process
3. To provide each student with maximum help during the writing process

STRUCTURE: A WRITING CYCLE

Mini-Comp Stage

Own Comp, Rough Stage

Rough Evaluation

Own Comp, Final Stage

Final Evaluation

FOREWORD

One truism accepted by most English teachers is that students learn to write by writing. But productive involvement in the composing process, especially with discursive prose, requires more than the act of pouring words onto paper in response to the desire or the direction to write on a given topic. In preparing to write well, the student must make decisions involving purpose, audience, voice, controlling idea, supporting evidence, and organizational plan. In the act of writing, the student faces further decisions in diction, sentence structure, paragraphing, transitions, and emphasis. Before revising the paper, the student needs and frequently wants to have audience reaction, preferably an audience of more than one. The conscientious English teacher, committed to providing guidance during each step of the process, faces an overwhelming challenge.

Individualizing the Teaching of Writing is one teacher's attempt to realize the truism and to respect the student's need for continuous feedback through the use of carefully structured small-group work during the composing process. The author of this instructional aid is

GEORGE E. DE CUIR
English Department Chairperson
South Gate Senior High School

We are indebted to him for his interest in the application of current instructional theories to classroom problems and for his willingness to record his plan for others to try. Mr. DeCuir would be the first to deny that his plan as outlined in this publication is a solution to the problem of individualizing instruction in composition. He offers it to his fellow English teachers rather as one way to attend to the rhetorical principles of purpose, audience, and voice, and to individual student needs for reaction during the composing process. For these contributions, we gratefully acknowledge his authorship of this publication.

ROGER HYNDMAN
Instructional Specialist, English

APPROVED:

NORMAN H. ROSSELL
Assistant Superintendent
Instructional Planning Division

INTRODUCTION

WRITING AS PROCESS

Composition is often a matter of the teacher giving a writing assignment, the student writing, and the teacher correcting and grading the finished work. Sometimes the teacher will insist on revision of the returned work if there is time. Then the next assignment is made, and another paper is due. The student anticipates Teacher's inevitable inspection - the searchlight that will expose all writing faults and blemishes to the world's attention. *Individualizing the Teaching of Writing* suggests that the teacher of writing, by playing a different role, can put the student into a process that will support that student through the stages of the writing act. This instructional aid suggests that the writing act need not be sudden death. It need not be simply trial-and-error practice on a lonely plateau, as though Teacher had sentenced the writer in banishment to "Go practice while I wait over here." It need not mean a crushing task into late hours for the teacher at the slag heap of countless papers, all to be assiduously marked only to be assiduously disregarded.

WHO NEEDS IT?

Some teachers reading this no doubt have undergone the rigors of teaching students to write what schools call "compositions" in the years from the seventh through the twelfth grade. Most of these teachers are probably in English or social sciences. From their experience, they know for sure that the more writing they assign, the more reading and correcting they do. How much time does a teacher have? How can these teachers breathe life into mechanical papers, stillborn as school drills? Teachers will remember, too, the mechanics of sentences hopelessly maimed and malformed by the bored, at best earnest, young people caught in the composition trap, looking for help from teachers who need help themselves.

SMALL-GROUP AS REMEDY

At this writing, many teachers either have worked in small groups in their own training or have used them as a means by which to teach. Small-group is not a new teaching mode, nor is it always the most effective. It is said to be a time waster. It can allow the individual to slack off, using the group as a shelter to conceal lack of personal commitment. It further presents the problem of matching up personalities. Certainly small-group is no panacea, but in spite of its limitations, it may be possible for us to adapt its unique advantages to the process of obtaining valid feedback for the student while writing. Our main subject in this

instructional aid is the process, or the cycle, through which we may provide a helpful environment for young writers. The structure of the process itself may serve as a hedge against some of the mentioned deficiencies that seem to plague small-group.

THE WRITING CYCLE:

A RATIONALE

Young writers need help during the writing act. This is the premise behind the use of the writing cycle and small groups. In learning to speak, we are helped to correct ourselves and to improve through leads that we receive in the reactions or retorts of others. The ear and the eye constantly gather feedback. When we write, there is none. Funny things lie there; silent on the page. Often we really didn't mean what the paper now says to us so strangely and so clumsily. Often the awkwardness is strangely invisible until pointed out, and this is the central problem. Somehow writing feedback must be provided, some means by which the writing can be consciously brought along, amended, improved by trial rather than killed by the stroke of Teacher's red pen.

The cycle is a process designed to protect the young writer by giving "public" feedback as a constant guide through the stages; personal time to write, especially in the rough stage; and a practical means, through criteria and small-group consensus, to judge whether or not the writer did very well what s/he set out to do.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The emphasis on small-group and feedback was drawn from James Moffett's *A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum, K-13: A Handbook for Teachers* and from his *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*, both published by Houghton Mifflin (Boston, 1968). Ideas on emphasizing continuous feedback were drawn from R. Zoellner's "Talkwrite: A Behavioral Pedagogy for Composition" (*College English*, XXX, January, 1969, 267-320). Dick Phelan, of the Montebello Unified School District, made valuable suggestions. Ideas and criteria developed by Paul B. Diederich in *Evaluation as Feedback and Guide: ACSD Yearbook, 1968* (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036) have been of use in formulating an evaluation process with a firm grounding in criteria.

GEORGE E. DE CUIR

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OVERVIEW OF THE PROCESS: A WRITING CYCLE

MINI-COMP STAGE

Each group is asked to produce a mini-comp, based on an assignment. Members of the group will analyze the assignment and compose a short version of the required paper, working within the assigned guidelines. (See Assignments, page 8.) Each person will contribute a sentence or two and put his/her name in the margin opposite. The finished paper will be kept very short in order to give a mini-view of the assignment for all involved.

OWN COMP, ROUGH STAGE

After completion and approval of the mini-comp, individuals in the same group begin work on the longer composition. This time, however, each group member develops an individual version of the composition, based upon the guidelines discussed and put to use in the mini-comp stage. The rough, then, is the first personal interpretation, developed individually to fulfill the assignment in a more complete way. There are two parts to this stage: composing and informal feedback during the writing.

ROUGH EVALUATION

An informal evaluation of each individual's complete rough by all members of the group. Formal rating with criteria sheets is not done at this point.

OWN COMP, FINAL STAGE

The writer uses the feedback and suggestions, reworks rough passages, and brings the work to the best possible state.

FINAL EVALUATION

All members of the group, including the writer, evaluate the work, using as criteria both the framework agreed upon by the group in writing the mini-comp and the guidelines set by the teacher. Each paper receives a consensus evaluation, marginal notations, and a computed total on an evaluation slip that is stapled to the work to guide revision.

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS FOR THE WRITING CYCLE

The outlined cycle can be adapted to many types of writing assignments and used at almost any grade level, depending on the ability and willingness of the class and the teacher to adapt to small-group interaction and to the flexible requirements of a planned series of student-centered writing activities. Some possible adaptations follow.

Determining beforehand the total scope of the class writing program by the kind and number of assignment packets provided.

Preparing a set of six or more separate assignments, prepackaged so that each group may choose a separate one to work on at the start of a cycle. In subsequent lessons, groups would choose a different assignment each time. The cycle has been tested with as many as 14 assignments available and with 6 in use at the same time.

Combinations of assignments. Creative writing assignments might include a short story, a personal reminiscence, and a personal letter. Expository writing assignments could include topic paragraphs, a report, argumentation, and a process description. The group could do several creative writing assignments in sequence, or these could be alternated with expository writing assignments.

Preparing one assignment for all groups. In this case, a final, full-class evaluation might be done on the most successful papers from each group.

Planning a series of back-to-back, concentrated writing experiences, progressing through an entire set of assignments without interruption by other work.

Breaking up the block of time. Cycles may be used intermittently, with interruptions for reading and for types of class work that stress other modes of speaking, listening, and performing (readers' theater, skits, etc.).

Stretching or compressing the single cycle by lengthening and shortening stages, or stopping in between stages to teach composition points.

PRELIMINARY PREPARATION

Provide for each student a number of evaluation slips and a copy of criteria suited to the ability level of the class. Examples are provided on pages 17-21.

ASSIGNMENTS

An instructional aid cannot anticipate the many types of assignment or the different grades and students they may be designed for. The following statements are suggested for consideration in framing assignments. Each assignment should be written out succinctly, reproduced in sufficient numbers, and the copies placed in a large, labeled envelope for safekeeping. The envelopes can be kept easily in a plain cardboard box.

Statement of the Problem

To compare or contrast experiences, ideas, things

or

To persuade an audience

or

To define an abstract idea through concrete illustration

or

To describe vividly, choosing consistent tone and detail

Statement on Aspects of the Problem

Suiting subject and vocabulary to audience

Recognizing levels of abstraction

Establishing tone through statement, repetition,
detail

Choosing a sequence of parallels or contrasts

Statement on the Audience

Classmates in general

or

A particular classmate

or

The public at large

or

A segment of the public

or

The teacher

or

Oneself

Statement on the Person

Choose the person to suit the audience

Personal argumentation to classmates for a
cause: we

or

Reminiscence: I

or

Controversy: third person

or

Personal explanation: second person

Statement on Mood or Tone

Earnest and serious

Witty but earnest

Humorous and entertaining

Biting and ironic

Scholarly and factual

Warm and personal

These are not mutually exclusive nor meant to be so. They serve to indicate the central tone or stance - the dominant feeling that the author wishes to convey.

Statement on Possible Topics

These are entirely up to the imagination of each teacher, for no one else can function so well as a resource person. Able students writing mini-comps in the past were convinced that they had little to say and that their range was limited. Discussing their interests with them often revealed a whole reservoir of experiences to be tapped. The students' experiences are their topics. A topic list helps a little, but things seem to go best when students look inside themselves for topics.

A SET OF PREPARED ASSIGNMENTS

The following group could possibly provide scope for six to twenty weeks of writing. These are merely examples of different types of assignments and are not meant to be a course prescription. The assignments are purposely general.

Compare or contrast several books, characters, experiences, ideas.

Describe an event with controlled emotion and tone; describe the same event without emotion or judgmental words.

Persuade an audience to support an idea or conviction through use of reasons and details.

Recall from the past an important personal experience in detail. Draw reflections and conclusions from it.

Devise a conversation between two persons to illustrate character.

Compose a scene or a story that centers on conflict.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENTS

These might be typical of what a group would find in a packet before starting its mini-comp.

ASSIGNMENT No. 1

THE PROBLEM: To compare or contrast persons, experiences, ideas, or things.

Aspects

Consider the evidence and use it. What did the persons say, do, think, or how did the experiences (ideas, things) differ? Select examples, quote lines.

Observations can be grouped as to similarities or differences. Which way?

Should one character (experiences, etc.) be discussed first completely, and then the other?

At what point should you bring out the dominating idea?

Audience

General audience. This paper is for the person on the street, without exceptional background.

Person

Use the third person in order to throw emphasis toward the facts and observations. The characters (experiences, etc.) discussed are the center of this paper.

Tone

Informal and persuasive. You are going to convince someone of the validity of your observations. Don't try to teach the person. Keep the tone natural but not breezy or slangy. Try to avoid stiffness. Your persuasiveness will increase according to the sharpness of the observations you can muster. Try to walk the line between showing somebody something that seems clear enough to you and yet not browbeating your audience.

MINI-COMP

STAGE: _____

In our class reading of "Two Soldiers" and "The Split Cherry Tree," we observed two fathers, one in each story. In what ways were those fathers alike or different? Return to the stories for reference. In your group, prepare a mini-comp on this subject.

(Special note: When the assignment is tied to a reading experience to begin with, then the own comp must come from the more broadly stated problem, or else the mini-comp will exhaust the topic.)

OWN COMP

STAGE: _____

Choose from people or from "experiences, ideas, or things," in your own life or in reading. Prepare a composition of comparison or contrast.

Possible Topics

Ocean bungalow versus mountain cabin
Two schools, classes, or teachers
Sports, professional or amateur
Recording artists and their works
Relatives, friends, parents
Personal successes
Good times
Weird times

ASSIGNMENT No. 2

THE PROBLEM:

To define an abstract term concretely.

Aspects

Choose a generic term, abstract enough for development. Some terms give less room: my bike, bubble gum, touch football.

Use metaphors if you wish: "Love is....," but avoid overuse. You may end up with a list.

Get some kind of umbrella statement in early to give direction to the paper.

Try for a range of solid illustrations to fill out your concept, so that your audience will say, "I know exactly what you mean when you use that term."

If you use a narrative to illustrate, be aware that this will take up much space. It should be very good. If in doubt, add other details and examples.

Audience

Your best friend.

Person

Use the second person. Imagine the person right there in front of you, trying to understand the way you use the term you are defining.

Tone

Serious and personal. Use "I" and "you" as often as you need. Your audience is puzzled. Imagine

that you can see that this person does not begin to feel the term the way you feel it, down inside. You are serious in this paper and, therefore, will avoid slang, because it is so often loose or vague. You want the other person to understand intimately how you come at this from the inside. Your audience is friendly. Take a warm, personal tone and make your point.

MINI-COMP AND

OWN COMP

STAGES:

Choose a term that means many things to many people and develop it through illustrations, reasoning, examples, and your own understanding of what the term means. This will be your personal definition and does not depend upon those in the dictionary.

Possible Topics

Freedom, beauty, love, wisdom, education, fun, success, pornography, maturity, religion.

CARE AND NURTURE OF THE STAGES: CONSIDERATIONS, PROBLEMS

THE MINI-COMP

Members of the group read and discuss the assignment aloud in order to plan the mini-comp, and also to understand the focus of the assignment for later evaluation.

Each student must participate and sign his sentence or two. A secretary may be appointed by the group to recopy the work in class or at home, as the first effort is often hard to read.

Class time required to complete the writing will vary, depending on the assignment. High school classes have averaged one full period; some classes have needed an extra half-period on a second day. Time must be allowed for discussion.

Length should be held to about a page. The object is not to exhaust a topic, but to learn the approach that each writer is to take. Groups have often written slightly more than a page. Exact length should not be an issue.

The teacher must circulate freely at this point, sitting in with groups that have questions, especially if several different assignments are being done at once.

Much actual writing and rewriting should be done right in the class. In the event of miscalculation of time, when a number of groups need more, some extension can be made. This is a delicate point. Deadlines should be set generously and as reasonably as possible, but they should then be held to firmly. The stages cannot be productive if deadlines have no meaning. In short, the teacher should not casually wipe out deadlines unless most of the class is unable to get the job done in the specified time.

Certain comps are difficult to write as minis. Groups have reported that an outline rather than a prose essay is better for a controversial issue, for example. The personal comp, of course, is not very personal as a group mini. Groups have found it easy, though, to arrive at common experiences, such as pet peeves or pet loves, from cafeteria food to "perfect" days or dates. Once in a while a student will ask to do an own comp

that is too personal for the group. Such an exception should be honored. Individuals should be encouraged during this mini-comp stage to begin summoning up their own ideas at the same time that they are framing the mini assignment with their group.

Mini-comps should be checked by the teacher for two main reasons: Small-group tone is set by the mini-comp, and the teacher must know whether the members of the group actually understood the task as outlined. At this point, follow-up can redirect good intentions and energy that has been puffing away in the wrong direction. It is difficult to "correct" a well-written paper that does not follow the assignment.

OWN COMP, ROUGH STAGE

Organization here is purposely loose. There are options for the student, who may work alone, with another student, with the entire group, or with the teacher.

This is the most difficult stage. Students sit and stare in the shock of creation. A collection of students' free writing is sometimes helpful here. Some teachers encourage each student to work up a bulk of free, uncorrected writing as a stockpile to trigger the imagination.

Talking can be permitted but should be controlled. In the trial course, students agreed on these rules of the road for this stage: no social chatter, no homework for other classes, no loafing or drifting about; some talking over ideas, some planning together, some trial-and-error feedback to each other, some privacy to work alone if desired.

The deadline for this stage must be realistic. Some students work poorly in class during this phase. In the trials, a homework follow-up and a second class period were found to be helpful. The class and the teacher together should set a realistic deadline, and some penalty should result from failure to meet it. Students must understand that the help they can get individually depends directly on each one's responsibility to get a paper to the group by deadline.

Roughs must be completed discourses. Definitions: Each paper should have a beginning, a middle, and an end. Lists and disjointed scribbles should not be

considered as roughs. The group will be unable to cope with them. Copy need not be beautiful, but it should be coherent and all of a piece.

ROUGH EVALUATION

Each rough is examined by the members of the group, and the author is given advice for revision and improvement.

Some groups prefer to have each member read a paper aloud to the group. Others like to pass the papers around, with each person making marginal comments, sometimes asking the author questions and discussing points. The best way is the one that works well for each group. Some groups have reported that they need a silent reading to pick up errors in mechanics, because oral readers add intonation and even correct grammar orally. Somehow marginal notations have to be made, or the writer can forget the comments when revising the paper.

The teacher should check and note how many papers are complete and ready. The benefit of feedback is lost if a paper is not ready. Even if it is done later as a makeup, the student will have lost the benefit of the process.

The length of this informal evaluation for all papers may vary from 30 minutes to a full period. After each rough has been evaluated, the student may proceed immediately into making revisions and completing the finished copy.

OWN COMP, FINAL STAGE

Students prepare their revisions, which have been polished in class and outside.

FINAL EVALUATION

All revisions have been made, and each student has a polished composition in all its glory. The group will make a formal and final evaluation.

Two sets of criteria have been found useful:

1. The original assignment, as worked through by the group in the mini-comp stage. This outlines the scope of the problem and brings the writer's

work into focus.

2. The duplicated criteria and evaluation slips, which each student has in a notebook.

The set of rhetorical criteria must be suited to the sophistication of the class. This instructional aid may err in suggesting more criteria rather than less. The teacher must choose.

Students may have trouble applying the criteria for the first time. Sample compositions, reproduced for the whole class or put on the opaque projector, may serve as a breaking-in for this stage. Groups may also practice with such papers in their training.

Evaluation will be only as good as the training and time spent in learning the criteria. Students familiar with the cycle made two major recommendations: "Teach us what the criteria mean. Give us sufficient time, once we are in groups, to do the final evaluation properly."

Each group will use consensus to arrive at a final numerical estimate of the paper, based on the criteria. The idea of consensus has to be explained and taught. If this is not done, groups may average the scores or take majority votes, neither of which satisfies the need for the kind of discussion that should be taking place.

Evaluations are stapled to the paper. All papers are turned in on completion of the group session.

The teacher does not enter into student evaluation sessions unless invited. Usually there is some call for the teacher, as a resource person, to settle a dispute over usage. Groups love their integrity.

Papers must be on time, on time, on time, or the process is frustrated.

GRADING: A FINAL WORD

The cycle and stages will take the pressure off the teacher to deliver a grade immediately after receiving the papers. The next-day syndrome - panic until grades are received - does not seem to operate. Perhaps this is because students already know to a good extent how they fared.

The teacher should apply the same evaluation criteria that the students used.

Withholding the letter grade and substituting multiple evaluations will further emphasize the process at this point. A letter grade from the teacher will represent closure.

Revision of the paper is still called for after the group's evaluation and the teacher's evaluation have been attached to the paper. Students who have undergone the experience have found at this point that it is useful to let the paper "get cold" before reworking it.

Reworking of their final own comps is a task that students will not perform unless target times are set and time is allowed for revision, both in and out of class. Abler students, it is said, will do such revision outside of class. Experience has shown that this is not always to be depended on.

Rollbook grades can be kept privately after teacher evaluations have been made. These can be a progress record. Sometimes they are needed for private conferences in which the student or parent would like a reference to a letter grade. Notations of both numerical scores also can be kept in the rollbook.

Finally, at some point the total writing output of each student, evaluated and revised, must be translated into a letter grade. A number of options are open to the teacher:

- Evaluate overall each student's total output, collected in a journal.

- Have the groups first do an evaluation of each finished journal, following the same procedures that have been established for judging individual compositions.

- Ask each student to conduct a final evaluation of his or her total output with revisions, noting the best work and recommending a letter grade.

EVALUATION CRITERIA

The following criteria are by Paul B. Diederich, Senior Research Associate, Educational Testing Service, Princeton, N.J., and are reprinted with permission. The terms "he" and "his" have been left as they appeared in Dr. Diederich's original paper and should be taken to refer to both sexes.

I. GENERAL MERIT

1. IDEAS

High. The student has given some thought to the topic and writes what he really thinks. He discusses each main point long enough to show clearly what he means. He supports each main point with arguments, examples, or details; he gives the reader some reason for believing it. His points are clearly related to the topic and to the main idea or impression he is trying to convey. No necessary points are overlooked and there is no padding.

Middle. The paper gives the impression that the student does not really believe what he is writing or does not fully understand what it means. He tries to guess what the teacher wants and writes what he thinks will get by. He does not explain his points very clearly or make them come alive to the reader. He writes what he thinks will sound good, not what he believes or knows.

Low. It is either hard to tell what points the student is trying to make or else they are so silly that, if he had only stopped to think, he would have realized that they made no sense. He is only trying to get something down on paper. He does not explain his points; he only asserts them and then goes on to something else, or he repeats them in slightly different words. He does not bother to check his facts, and much of what he writes is obviously untrue. No one believes this sort of writing - not even the student who wrote it.

2. ORGANIZATION

High. The paper starts at a good point, has a sense of movement, gets somewhere, and then stops. The paper has an underlying plan that the reader can follow; he is never in doubt as to where he is or where he is going. Sometimes there is a little twist near the end that makes the paper come out in a way that the reader does not expect, but it seems quite logical. Main points are treated at greatest length or with greatest emphasis, others in proportion to their importance.

Middle. The organization of this paper is standard and conventional. There is usually a one-paragraph introduction, three main points each treated in one paragraph, and a conclusion that often seems tacked on or forced. Some trivial points are treated in greater detail than important points, and there is usually some dead wood that might better be cut out.

Low. This paper starts anywhere and never gets anywhere. The main points are not clearly separated from one another, and they come in a random order - as though the student had not given any thought to what he intended to say before he started to write. The paper seems to start in one direction, then another, then another, until the reader is lost.

3. WORDING

High. The writer uses a sprinkling of uncommon words or of familiar words in an uncommon setting. He shows an interest in words and in putting them together in slightly unusual ways. Some of his experiments with words may not quite come off, but this is such a promising trait in a young writer that a few mistakes may be forgiven. For the most part, he uses words correctly, but he also uses them with imagination.

Middle. The writer is addicted to tired old phrases and hackneyed expressions. If you left a blank in one of his sentences, almost anyone could guess what word he would use at that point. He does not stop to think how to say something; he just says it in the same way as everyone else. A writer may also get a middle rating on this quality if he overdoes his experiments with uncommon words: if he always uses a big word when a little word would serve his purpose better.

Low. The writer uses words so carelessly and inexactly that he gets far too many wrong. These are not intentional experiments with words in which failure may be forgiven; they represent groping for

words and using them without regard to their fitness. A paper written in a childish vocabulary may also get a low rating on this quality, even if no word is clearly wrong.

4. FLAVOR

High. The writing sounds like a person, not a committee. The writer seems quite sincere and candid, and he writes about something he knows, often from personal experience. You could not mistake this writing for the writing of anyone else. Although the writer may assume different roles in different papers, he does not put on airs. He is brave enough to reveal himself just as he is.

Middle. The writer usually tries to appear better or wiser than he really is. He tends to write lofty sentiments and broad generalities. He does not put in the little homely details that show that he knows what he is talking about. His writing tries to sound impressive. Sometimes it is impersonal and correct but colorless, without personal feeling or imagination.

Low. The writer reveals himself well enough but without meaning to. His thoughts and feelings are those of an uneducated person who does not realize how bad they sound. His way of expressing himself differs from standard English, but it is not his personal style; it is the way uneducated people talk in his neighborhood. Sometimes the unconscious revelation is so touching that we are tempted to rate it high on flavor, but it deserves a high rating only if the effect is intended.

II. MECHANICS

5. USAGE, SENTENCE

STRUCTURE

High. There are no vulgar or "illiterate" errors in usage by present standards of informal written English, and there are very few errors in points that have been discussed in class. The sentence structure is usually correct, even in varied and complicated sentence patterns.

Middle. There are a few serious errors in usage and several in points that have been discussed in class but not enough to obscure meaning. The sentence structure is usually correct in familiar sentence patterns but

there are occasional errors in complicated patterns: errors in parallelism, subordination, consistency of tenses, reference of pronouns, etc.

Low. There are so many serious errors in usage and sentence structure that the paper is hard to understand.

6. PUNCTUATION,

CAPITALS,

ABBREVIATIONS,

NUMBERS

High. There are no serious violations of rules that have been taught - except slips of the pen. Note, however, that modern editors do not require commas after short introductory clauses, around nonrestrictive clauses, or between short coordinate clauses unless their omission leads to ambiguity or makes the sentence hard to read. Contractions are acceptable - often desirable.

Middle. There are several violations of rules that have been taught - as many as usually occur in the average paper. Counts of such errors in high, middle, and low papers at various ages and socioeconomic levels would be desirable in order to establish standards.

Low. Basic punctuation is omitted or haphazard, resulting in fragments, run-on sentences, etc.

7. SPELLING

High. Descriptions of spelling levels are most often used in grading test papers written in class. Since there is insufficient time to make full use of the dictionary, spelling standards should be more lenient than for papers written at home. The high paper (at ages 14-16) usually has not more than five misspellings, and these occur in words that are hard to spell. The spelling is consistent; words are not spelled correctly in one sentence and misspelled in another - unless the misspelling appears to be a slip of the pen. If a poor paper has no misspellings, it gets a high rating on spelling, even if no difficult words are used.

Middle. There are several spelling errors in hard words and a few violations of basic spelling rules, but no more than one finds in the average paper. Spelling standards differ so sharply from grade to grade and from one socioeconomic level to another that each school would do well to make a distribution of spelling errors per hundred words (at least for test papers

written in class) and relate its ratings to this distribution.

Low. There are so many spelling errors that they interfere with comprehension.

8. HANDWRITING,

NEATNESS

High. The handwriting is clear, attractive, and well spaced, and the rules of manuscript form have been observed.

Middle. The handwriting is average in legibility and attractiveness. There may be a few violations of rules for manuscript form if there is evidence of some care for the appearance of the page.

Low. The paper is sloppy in appearance and difficult to read. It may be excellent in other respects and still get a low rating on this quality.

EVALUATION SLIP

Topic	Reader		Paper			
	Low		Middle		High	
Ideas	2	4	6	8	10	
Organization	2	4	6	8	10	
Wording	1	2	3	4	5	
Flavor	1	2	3	4	5	
Usage	1	2	3	4	5	_____
Punctuation	1	2	3	4	5	
Spelling	1	2	3	4	5	
Handwriting	1	2	3	4	5	_____
					Sum	_____

AFTERWORD

There are probably as many ways of learning to write as there are writers. Professionals confess to every conceivable way often not including the classroom. It is not even unknown for experienced classroom teachers to protest that it is impossible to teach a person to write. If writing is thinking and thinking is significant learnings -- deeper, insightful learnings, as defined by Carl Rogers -- then we must add to the list of protesters the distinguished Rogers, who maintains that no significant learnings can be taught. Is it enough to say, then, that every person writes alone? Further, if composition has been represented as synthesis at the peak of Bloom's taxonomy, is the composition teacher not presumptuous to think he can lead others to the summit?

The suggested approach to classroom writing, while recognizing insight and the private aspects of the writing act, suggests that these cannot be the end of it all. In an experimental first year, this approach has shown some promise that there can be a positive writing environment beneath Olympus in the classroom, where reaction and feedback can at best significantly improve writing and at least strengthen and give heart to student writers. Beneath Olympus, certainly the numbers are always with us. It may be possible to turn those very numbers to a unique strength through the small-group process in the writing laboratory.

GEORGE E. DE CUIR